

Statement on Teaching

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If I were to summarize my teaching philosophy in a single word, it would be empowerment. Often times, students – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – leave social science programs with substantive knowledge but little idea of how to apply it confidently. Such programs are oft viewed as stepping stones to other careers – typically law or consulting – but not necessarily a source of useful, everyday skills. In my mind, this is unfortunate. Ideally, coursework should provide knowledge, a broader set of skills for applying it, and crucially *confidence in doing so in the real world*. Two teaching positions I held prior to graduate school crystallized this for me: my work as a teaching assistant for a Portuguese language class and in my undergraduate university's jewelry studio. In both cases, the goal was to teach students with no prior knowledge how to confidently (and safely) apply knowledge to real life scenarios – the former in a freshmen summer semester trip to Brazil and the latter in their own projects. Although less stark, I believe that all courses have similar important applications for students' lived experience, if only teachers can show the connections.

I believe that applying this lesson to coursework in the social sciences involves providing students with substantive and methodological tools to make them good consumers and producers of research. They should be able to confidently critique the claims and projects of others, while also being able to devise a strategy for researching and defending their own. Although few will ever need to write formal papers, the ability to intelligently evaluate arguments and formulate strategies for answering questions are critical in all fields. I therefore try to integrate the basics of research design into all my teaching. My introductory course in political science at the Higher School of Economics (HSE), *Modern Political Science*, is a good example of this in practice. Substantively, the course aims to introduce Masters' students from diverse backgrounds to major themes and trends in Western political science. Methodologically, however, I devote several weeks to basic research design, causal inference, and best practices for research. The goal is to help students understand how modern research is conducted and how to pick apart the strengths and weaknesses of projects. We then apply these lessons to the course readings (relevant articles from leading journals) in seminar, which are designed to help students to comfortably engage with world class work. I reinforce these lessons with a series of short critiques to help students learn to confidently articulate their positions. By showing students they can make useful, practical suggestions to improve or extend published work, I build their confidence in evaluating others' arguments and claims. The culmination is to apply these lessons to a project proposal. Taken together, these steps help students understand how to confidently apply their newfound knowledge.

Another example of my commitment to empowering students to be good producers and consumers of research can be seen in my work helping students develop original research. One element of this is in my participation in HSE's mandatory Research Seminars for first year Masters' students. These seminars are mandatory for all students and are designed to teach them the skills necessary to produce original, analytical work in their fields. My section is a short-course designed to help students learn basic academic writing and to provide them assistance in designing their first year capstone papers. To achieve these aims, I have students turn in a research proposal (5 – 10 pages) at the beginning of my section that outlines their project and research design. I then provide them extensive feedback, which they then incorporate into a set of presentations that we then critique as class. In the final iteration, the students then rewrite their proposals incorporating all feedback from me and their classmates (or at least responding to it). For me, this is one of my favorite exercises. Not only can I see the progress the students make during the course itself, but I also get to see how my feedback influences the final product from my perch on the capstone project evaluation committee.

A second element of my participation in students' original work is in my role as a supervisor for Bachelors', Masters', and Doctoral students' theses (19 in total). Supervising student research at HSE is challenging. On the one hand, the requirements for theses are demanding: students are expected to produce a high-quality, original research paper with a heavy component of empirical analysis. On the other hand, HSE's programs (particularly at the Masters' level) takes an interdisciplinary approach – pulling in applications from economics, political science, sociology, and law – that often means that students are not exposed to contemporary political science methods and theories. For our Russian students, this problem is exacerbated by the state of much of Russian political science education, which remains rooted in Soviet era practices and literatures. Yet if anything, these challenges reaffirmed my beliefs in empowering students at every opportunity. By spending substantial amounts of time with individual students to understand the fundamental questions about politics that motivate them, it is possible to hone research questions that they are truly passionate about. I have found that this, in turn, makes them much more willing to learn new methodological techniques, seek

out new data and cases, and craft high quality research designs in order to answer these questions.

I would note, however, that my commitment to empowering students also extends to including them in research activities. One way I have done this is as data coordinator for the International Center for the Study of Institutions and Development (ICSID), where I am a research fellow. A common issue we found in hiring student research assistants was a disconnect between their sophistication at modern, quantitative data science and their skills at more traditional, particularly qualitative, data collection. To solve this problem, I instituted a number of initiatives to provide more broad-based methodological training and provide opportunities for professional development to our team of approximately 10 student RA's. These included training sessions in best-practices for dealing with qualitative data, including keeping documentation and field notebooks, coding qualitative data, the use of search engines and internet sources, content analysis of media, etc. To my satisfaction, many of our RA's have applied these skills to their own research projects.

I have also involved students directly in my research, where possible. In both my grant on vocational education and service provision, I created a number of paid positions (4 for Doctoral Students, 7 for Masters'/Bachelors' students) that I was able to fill with advanced students interested in these areas. In both projects, I was able to tailor students' tasks and provide resources that would enable them to collect original data for their theses and dissertations. Just as crucially, involving students in these projects allowed them to gain experience on the entire cycle of research, from conceptualizing a project and crafting a research design to data collection and write-ups. I am particularly proud that a number of my students were able to use these opportunities and resources to produce their own original, high-quality research.

In addition to my conventional teaching experience, I should note that I also have extensive experience in pedagogical program coordination and development. My colleagues at HSE quickly recognized my passion for holistic approaches to program curricula design and strong emphasis on adjusting my courses to fill gaps in them. Consequently, I was appointed to the Academic Council for my departments' two Masters' programs in 2018 and to the Academic Council of the Ph.D program in 2019. In these roles, I have been responsible for identifying pedagogical gaps in each program and either finding existing courses in other departments or helping to design new ones to fill them. I have also sat on the formal evaluation committees for students' yearly term paper projects, as well as the state examination committee for their final theses.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a few reflections on my potential contributions to your department's course listings. As noted above, I am qualified to teach basic introductory courses in comparative politics. I have also served as a TA for introductory courses in international relations (at Columbia) and can teach those courses, as well. More broadly, I would welcome teaching courses at any level on political economy, the politics of the post-communist countries (particularly Russian and Eastern Europe), distributive politics, and/or the welfare state in a comparative perspective. Aside from substantive knowledge, my teaching approach would heavily emphasize basic empirical literacy and would be geared towards helping students, particularly undergraduates, understand how to incorporate critiques of data and method into their evaluations of material. In an introductory undergraduate course, for example, I would want to dedicate a week or two to teaching basic research design and causal inference, as well as how to evaluate quantitative and qualitative data. I have found that small research papers (5 pages), as well as periodic written critiques of each week's material are particularly helpful in reinforcing these lessons and helping students to apply them. In more advanced or courses, I would expand this to include more traditional research papers in close consultation with me.

In addition to substantive courses, I would also be eager to teach methodology, especially a more traditional quantitative course on applied statistics. Here, my approach would heavily emphasize replication and the ability to work with statistical packages on short, original projects based on open-source datasets. I would similarly be interested in teaching a broader course on research design including causal inference, project design, and best practices in mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) research. Such a course would equip students with skills to define and pursue their own research projects, whether inside or outside the academy. Finally, given my emphasis on methodological literacy, I would also welcome the opportunity to continue to supervise individual student research at both the undergraduate and graduate level as we as teach an undergraduate or masters' thesis seminar or a graduate-level dissertation seminar.